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General Assembly

Official Records

Disarmament Commission

368th meeting
Wednesday, 21 February 2018, 10 a.m.
New York

Chair: Mrs. Martinic ..... (Argentina)

The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

Opening of the session

The Acting Chair (*spoke in Spanish*): I declare open the 2018 organizational session of the Disarmament Commission.

Draft provisional agenda for the 2018 organizational session of the Disarmament Commission (A/CN.10/L.79)

The Acting Chair (*spoke in Spanish*): As in past years, the Commission is convened today for a brief session to deal with its organizational matters, including the election of the Chair and other members of the Bureau for 2018.

I would now like to draw the Commission's attention to the provisional agenda for this organizational session, as contained in document A/CN.10/L.79.

If there are no comments, I shall take it that the Commission wishes to adopt the provisional agenda as contained in document A/CN.10/L.79.

The agenda was adopted.

Election of the Chair and other officers

The Acting Chair (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with the established practice of rotation, it is the Group of Western European and other States that has the honour of nominating the candidate for the post of Chair of the Commission at its 2018 session. I have received an official communication from the Chair of that Group informing me that the Group has reached an agreement on the nomination of Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Gillian Bird of Australia as the candidate for the chairmanship of the Commission at its 2018 session.

If I hear no objection, I shall take it that it is the wish of the Commission to elect Ms. Gillian Bird as Chair of the United Nations Disarmament Commission by acclamation.

It was so decided.

The Acting Chair (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the Commission and on my own behalf, I congratulate Ms. Gillian Bird, Permanent Representative of Australia, on her election to this high office. We look forward to benefiting from her experience and diplomatic skills. We wish her every success in discharging her new and important duties. For our part, we will remain at her service with support and counsel, as necessary.

With those brief remarks I invite Ms. Bird to take the Chair.

Ms. Bird (Australia) took the Chair.

The Chair: At the outset, allow me to express my gratitude to the members of the Commission for electing me Chair of the United Nations Disarmament Commission and for entrusting me with the important task of chairing this year's session of the Commission's work. I count on the support and cooperation of all Member States in achieving the important goals of the Commission before us. As Chair, I am committed to being fair, open and approachable. I therefore invite

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members to contact me should anyone have any questions at any time during my term.

Before turning to the next item on our agenda, let me also pay a very well-deserved tribute to the Chair of the United Nations Disarmament Commission at its 2017 substantive session, Mrs. Gabriela Martinic, for the excellent guidance and outstanding leadership she provided to the Commission. As she comes to the end of her term here in New York, let me also wish her, on behalf of us all, the best for the future. My gratitude also goes to the other members of the Bureau and the Chairs of the Working Groups for their valiant and tireless efforts.

Finally, let me thank the delegations for their constructive spirit and cooperation during the Commission's previous session. All of those factors made it possible to overcome an impasse of 17 years in the Disarmament Commission and unanimously agree on a set of recommendations in Working Group II, on conventional weapons. I hope that this constructive spirit and cooperation will also be a feature of this year's Commission.

As I mentioned during the informal consultations, there are plenty of good reasons to get this year's session off to a good start. Let me mention just a few of those reasons here.

First, for the delegations that are signatories to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), this three-year Disarmament Commission cycle leads right up to the 2020 NPT Review Conference. Apparently, that is quite rare with Disarmament Commission cycles, which are often out of sync with the NPT Review Conference. I would like to encourage all delegations to consider making the most of this opportunity for the Commission to make a substantive contribution to the NPT Review Conference outcomes.

Secondly, the high-level meeting on nuclear disarmament will be held in mid-May here in New York. That meeting will occur shortly after the Commission wraps up, so getting off to a good start here could also help set the tone for that meeting.

Thirdly, subject to agreement on the agenda, delegations could be considering outer space transparency and confidence-building measures for the first time in the Commission. So, in that sense, we have some responsibility as pioneers to launch those space discussions in a fruitful and constructive manner that could enable an outcome at the end of the cycle.

Finally, during our informal consultations, I said that I hoped that the optimism recently enjoyed by Disarmament Commission delegations here might positively influence our long-suffering colleagues in Geneva. That positive influence does indeed seem to be having an impact. I was pleased to hear that last week the Conference on Disarmament adopted a decision to establish five subsidiary bodies to progressively advance the substantive work of the Commission, and I would like to wish those bodies all the best with their work.

We will now proceed with the third item on our agenda, the election of other officers of the Disarmament Commission for 2018.

I am pleased to inform the Commission of the following endorsement received from regional groups. The African States have endorsed the candidature of Mr. Bassem Hassan of the Permament Mission of Egypt and Mr. Mustapha Abbani of the Permanent Mission of Algeria as Vice-Chairs from the Group of African States. The Asia-Pacific States have endorsed the candidatures of Mr. Nirupam Dev Nath, Counsellor of the Permanent Mission of Bangladesh, and Mr. Surendra Thapa, Counsellor of the Permanent Mission of Nepal, as Vice-Chairs from the Asia-Pacific Group. The Eastern European States have endorsed the candidature of Mr. Volodymyr Leschenko, First Secretary of the Permanent Mission of Ukraine, as Vice-Chair from the Group of Eastern European States. Finally, the Latin American and Caribbean States have endorsed Ms. Diedre Mills, Deputy Permanent Representative of Jamaica, for the position of Rapporteur from the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States.

If I hear no objection, I will take it that the Commission wishes to elect those candidates.

It was so decided.

The Chair: Allow me, on behalf of the Commission, to warmly congratulate the elected representatives and wish them every success in discharging their duties.

As to the election of the other officers of the Bureau, I have been informed that consultations are still going on within other regional groups on possible candidates for the remaining posts of Vice-Chairs. The Commission will therefore address this issue at a later stage.

Review of resolution 72/66, entitled "Report of the Disarmament Commission", adopted by the General Assembly at its seventy-second session

The Chair: As members of the Commission are aware, the General Assembly adopted one resolution that has a specific bearing on the work of the Commission. Resolution 72/66, entitled "Report of the Disarmament Commission", was adopted by the General Assembly at its 62nd plenary meeting, on 4 December 2017, under agenda item 101 (b). I would draw the attention of the Commission to paragraphs 2, 3, 5, 6 and 8 of the resolution, which are relevant to the work of the Commission this year. Members will recall that in paragraph 6 of the resolution, the substantive items for consideration at the 2018 substantive session of the Commission were yet to be determined.

As members are aware, decision 52/492, which guides the procedures of the Commission, is very clear on this issue. Let me quote paragraph (b) of the decision:

> "[T]he substantive agenda of the Disarmament Commission should normally comprise two agenda items per year from the whole range of disarmament issues, including one on nuclear disarmament. The possibility of a third agenda time would be retained if there were a consensus to adopt such an item. Parallel meetings of its subsidiary bodies should be avoided".

Provisional agenda for the 2018 substantive session of the Disarmament Commission

The Chairman: As members can see in the provisional agenda for this session (A/CN.10/L.80), agenda items 4 and 5 are left blank. As I mentioned during the informal consultations, it is my intention, subject to the views of the membership, to seek a decision today on the two substantive agenda items that we will have for the 2018 session and for the rest of the three-year cycle in the two Working Groups.

Accordingly, following intensive informal discussions, the proposal is to adopt the following two substantive agenda items: "Recommendations for achieving the objective of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation of nuclear weapons" and "In accordance with the recommendations contained in the report of the Group of Governmental Experts on Transparency and Confidence-building Measures in Outer Space Activities (A/68/189), preparation of recommendations to promote the practical implementation of transparency and confidence-building measures in outer space activities with the goal of preventing an arms race in outer space".

Given the strong support in the informal consultations for these two agenda items, may I take it that it is the wish of the Commission to adopt the provisional agenda, as contained in document A/CN.10/L.80, with the inclusion of these two substantive agenda items?

It was so decided.

The Chair: Separate to the formal agenda, during our informal consultations we also considered whether informal discussions on conventional weapons should occur during one or two meetings of the Commission held in reserve, similar to the format of those held on outer space in 2016 and 2017. Some delegations expressed interest in this, while others either opposed or questioned the value of such an exercise. The Chair has not received any substantive proposals for such informal discussions, but should there be any they would need to be agreed by all delegations. Are there any views on this issue?

Mr. Seifi Pargou (Islamic Republic of Iran): First, I would like to congratulate you, Madam Chair, and the other members of the Bureau on your well-deserved election and express our full support for and cooperation with your work during this session of the United Nations Disarmament Commission (UNDC).

Our position with regard to the items on the agenda is well known. We are strong advocates of the first substantive agenda item, "Recommendations for achieving the objective of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation of nuclear weapons". As to the second substantive agenda item, on outer space, like most delegations my delegation attaches great importance to the prevention of an arms race in outer space. Accordingly, last year we agreed to the inclusion of a third item on outer space in the agenda of the UNDC. This year, we also support the inclusion of a second item on outer space.

However, we wish to make an observation on the formulation of this agenda item, which seems to suggest that the report of the 2013 report of the Group of Governmental Experts on Transparency and Confidence-building Measures in Outer Space Activities (A/68/189) is the only source in consideration of this item. This issue is important, in particular taking

into account the fact that the aforementioned document has never been adopted or endorsed by the General Assembly. Through its various resolutions, the General Assembly has only welcomed the note by the Secretary-General transmitting the report. Therefore, we believe that a report with that status cannot and should not be considered as the only basis for the consideration of this agenda item.

Accordingly, we would like to put on record our observation that we agreed to this agenda item based on the understanding that the 2013 report of the Group of Governmental Experts on Transparency and Confidence-building Measures in Outer Space Activities is not the only basis for consideration of this item, and that other relevant documents will also be taken into account.

Likewise, reference to the 2013 report of the Group of Governmental Experts in this item should not be seen as upgrading the current status of the report, as a document that has not been adopted by the Assembly. Moreover, it is without prejudice to the substantive discussions or possible negotiations on the prevention of an arms race in outer space within the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva.

We will continue to be flexible and constructive, hoping that the Commission will be able to agree on a set of recommendations in its current cycle, in particular on nuclear disarmament, which is long overdue.

Mr. Denktaş (Turkey): I congratulate you, Madam, on your election.

Turkey has found the informal discussions on outer space that we held earlier to be quite useful, so while we support and join the consensus on the agenda items that we have just approved, we would like to suggest that we at least continue that sort of discussion on the general subject of conventional weapons this year, too.

Ms. Sánchez Rodríguez (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation congratulates you, Madam, on your election as Chair of the Disarmament Commission at its 2018 session, as well as the other members of the Bureau of the Commission on their election.

As it has traditionally done, my delegation supports the two agenda items, in particular "Recommendations for achieving the objective of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation of nuclear weapons". Cuba firmly supports nuclear disarmament and believes that we should adopt recommendations on this subject. It is also a traditional position held by the Non-Aligned Movement. We also hope that, over the next three years, we will be able to achieve results in preventing an arms race in outer space, which is also a subject that Cuba strongly supports, having co-sponsored draft resolutions in the First Committee on outer space.

With regard to the question as to whether we want to hold informal discussions at this session on conventional weapons, my delegation believes that there are divergent views on bringing this issue to Commission meetings during the 2018-2020 cycle. Given those differences, I would ask why we would discuss this issue in the light of the fact that, during the third Review Conference of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, we will have the opportunity to make progress on substantive issues relating to conventional weapons, and that last year we had gratifying results on confidence-building measures on conventional weapons.

Mr. Luque Márquez (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I congratulate you, Madam Chair, on your election. I also congratulate the other members of the Bureau and pledge the support of Ecuador. Obviously, we are gratified by the decision regarding the two substantive items on the agenda, particularly the first.

On the second item, during consultations we expressed our reservations, which the representative of Iran also partially shared. In any case, on the question that you have just asked, Madam Chair, I cannot deny that I am somewhat surprised. I thought that the issue had been addressed in consultations and that, the differences among us being apparent, it would not be brought up today. However, since it has been mentioned, I will now formally voice the same doubts that have not yet been satisfactorily addressed by the proponents of the idea.

There is much talk about the efficient and effective use of time. In discussions throughout the United Nations, it has almost become a mantra of some delegations. In that regard, I have certain reservations. With regard to the two substantive items that were adopted a few minutes ago, we hope that we will have recommendations to make at the end of the cycle in three years — that is, that there will be a concrete result to present to the General Assembly as the fruit of discussions in the United Nations Disarmament Commission.

What is the proposed outcome of these informal discussions? Because that is what they would be — one or two days of informal discussions — at least according to what we have heard. Now, I have just heard the representative of Turkey call for a continuation of discussions on conventional weapons, but obviously we would have to determine the context in which these would be held and how many days we would meet. From what we have heard so far, it would be one or two days beyond the Commission's current provisional calendar to consider the items on the agenda. I have heard that discussions could last for one or two days, one or two evenings, one or two Commission meetings. What would the outcome be?

When such informal discussions on the topic of outer space took place in the previous cycle, it was with a view to determining how that proposal could be integrated into the Commission's current cycle. That has already occurred. There, we had a concrete outcome. But here, what would be the concrete outcome of the proposed informal discussions on conventional weapons? I asked that question during consultations and while I apologize if anyone answered it, I did not hear any response about the expected outcome. It could only be to keep the issue alive, which is already the case, as the representative of Cuba pointed out, because we now have the 2018 Review Conference of the United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, as well as all of the other activities related to conventional weapons.

Moreover, three years from now any delegation will be able to present and propose to the Commission that it add conventional weapons as a second item on the agenda, if necessary. But again, I do not see the utility. I think it distracts the Commission unnecessarily and it is certainly not an adequate use of the resources, the time or even the capacity of missions, especially the smaller ones.

Mr. Cooles (United Kingdom): I would like to congratulate you, Madam Chair, and the other elected members of the Bureau on your election.

I will speak very briefly to clearly register our support for the two agenda items, as adopted, on non-proliferation and outer space. I also want to quickly register the United Kingdom's support for the proposal from my colleague from Turkey. I very much appreciate the views of others expressed in this room. I understand those concerns. The view of my delegation is that given last year's breakthrough, there is a major benefit to continuing momentum, and that such informal discussions on conventional weapons would indeed be useful. I do note the concerns of other delegations and would be interested in hearing the views of others in this room.

Ms. Jáquez Huacuja (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Madam, on your election to the chairmanship. We are confident that under your leadership, this deliberative disarmament body of the United Nations will fulfil its mandate. We also pledge the support of the delegation of Mexico and its flexibility in the furtherance of these tasks.

That is why I wanted to respond to the question concerning the additional theme of conventional weapons potentially to be addressed in informal discussions in the Commission, in a format yet to be decided. My delegation has already expressed its readiness and flexibility in addressing that issue if the Commission so desires. Nevertheless, we are very familiar with the reservations of some delegations in that regard. Without detracting from any proposal from the Chair, we too would like to share our thoughts.

This issue should not distract us from addressing the main items that have just been adopted on the Commission's agenda with a view to generating recommendations, as that is an essential part of the Commission's mandate. However, given that it is a deliberative body, the Commission can continue to consider issues that could benefit its mandate, as I said previously. As such, if we were to set up an informal group, as we did for outer space and other issues, that could meet to address some specific subjects related to conventional weapons, without interfering with the substantive work of the Commission, my delegation would be in favour.

Nevertheless, what seems to not be clear is the scope of implementation of such meetings or consultations. Some believe that such meetings would conflict with other meetings or duplicate the work of other meetings, such as those to be held later this year in New York on the United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects. Other delegations claim that there is nothing to discuss with regard to conventional weapons. In Mexico's view,

there could be a useful discussion on the possible links, duplication, interaction and synergies between various consultations on conventional weapons because the Programme of Action is of very limited scope when it comes to the totality of conventional weapons.

In conclusion, we will expect the scope of the discussion on conventional weapons in the informal consultations to be clearly defined if there is a concrete proposal. Of course, the Commission can rest assured of the flexibility and the support of the delegation of Mexico if it decides to proceed accordingly.

Mrs. Jarrot (France) (*spoke in French*): I, too, would like to congratulate you, Madam Chair, on your assumption of the chairmanship of the Disarmament Commission. I also welcome the adoption of the work agenda.

I would just like to echo the remark of our colleague from the United Kingdom and of others in the room with regard to the fact that it would be useful to build on our work of last year on the issue of conventional weapons by having informal discussions in addition to our deliberations on the two items on the provisional agenda that we just adopted, which will enable us to continue the deliberations and to once again build on last year's consensus recommendations.

Mr. Jiménez (Nicaragua) (*spoke in Spanish*): We would like also to congratulate you, Madam Chair, on your election as Chair of the Disarmament Commission and to commend the other members of the Bureau on their election. We would also like to thank you for the topics proposed for the Commission's agenda, which we fully support in terms of the priority of making recommendations in the areas of nuclear disarmament and of preventing an arms race in outer space. We also co-sponsored those resolutions in the First Committee.

However, we would like to join the current discussion on the proposal before us with regard to the informal discussions on conventional weapons. We, too, would like to underscore the scope and to have more information as to the real purpose of discussing that topic when, as other colleagues have said before I took the floor, there is an upcoming conference here in New York, namely, the Conference to Review Progress Made in the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects. That may be a duplication of efforts.

We understand that this is a deliberative body and we are keen to hear the scope for continuing to consider that proposal. However, we believe that it should not distract us from the priorities of the Commission and the agenda items that we just adopted, since it disperses efforts when we have to focus on items mandated by the Commission. For our part, we are a small delegation and it would take us more time and additional staff in order to be able to cover all those meetings.

Mr. Luque Márquez (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I apologize for taking the floor again, while it may be more common in an interactive debate. I only wanted to reiterate what I said earlier. With due respect, I have the impression — and I may of course be mistaken — that, apart from the supporters of the idea to continue discussions on conventional weapons, there is no clarity as to the objective, the contents or, as the representative of Mexico rightly said, the scope of the discussion.

We have just heard the representative of France say that we need to build on the outcome and success of the discussion on conventional weapons in the previous session. That is all very well. At the time, we talked about confidence-building measures in the area of conventional weapons. Is the proposal to continue those discussions? Or are we going to discuss new topics? We have just heard a written proposal concerning synergies. That has recently been a frequent topic in the area of small weapons. My delegation is ready to discuss and to continue consultations on the topic, as you proposed, Madam Chair, but we believe that we need more clarity on what is required and on the efficient use of time and resources of missions, as the representative of Nicaragua has just said. That should also be taken into account.

Mr. Denktaş (Turkey): I really appreciate all the thoughts that have been expressed. I would particularly like to thank the representative of Mexico for his constructive approach to the issue. I was a member of the Bureau when we reached consensus on conventional weapons after 17 years. I appreciate the value of that. Our feeling was that continuing the tradition of informal discussions at the end of each session was quite helpful. It prepared the ground for other achievements in the future.

Returning to the issue of the efficient use of resources, as I said, I recall discussing the issue today and at least two other meetings. I believe that we could have used our energy and resources in something

more productive. However, again, consensus is very important. That is how, after 17 years, we achieved some recommendations on conventional weapons. I see that there is no consensus on this issue to discuss in one or two meetings what we can generally do to maintain the momentum with regard to conventional weapons. There is not going to be any progress in that regard. I am therefore not going to continue or to follow up on that recommendation or proposal.

The Chair: If there are no further comments, allow me to thank all representatives who have spoken on this issue and for the exchange of views.

As has just been said, there are clearly different views on the issue and, in particular, there are questions about the scope of any such discussions. As our colleague from Turkey mentioned, there is obviously no consensus on the issue. We will therefore not be in a position to take a decision at this session. We will continue informal consultations on the issue to see if some of the differences can be narrowed. I would like to thank all members for the views that they have expressed today. It was a useful exchange on the issue.

I have been asked to mention a few points about the session and finances.

The United Nations Disarmament Commission is a subsidiary body of the General Assembly and meets annually. Its sessions are financed from regular budgets and do not require additional funding. Moreover, in accordance with decision 52/492, of 1998, the annual substantive sessions of the Commission should last three weeks. As a result, during the 2018 session, the Commission will work on the basis of our usual practice, namely, a three-week session. With that in mind, and as mandated by resolution 72/66, the Secretariat has made arrangements for the 2018 substantive session to be held from 2 to 20 April.

Organizational matters

The Chair: I should like to note that, pursuant to resolution 44/119, of 15 December 1989, all organizational matters should be concluded at the organizational session of the Disarmament Commission. Unfortunately, as I have already informed the Commission, we are not in a position to conclude those organizational matters in view of the following outstanding vacancies: one Vice-Chair from the Group of Eastern European States; one Vice-Chair from the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States; and one Vice-Chair from the Group of West European and Other States. I would like to take this opportunity to appeal to the regional groups concerned to conduct all necessary consultations to enable the Commission to start its substantive work on 2 April, as planned, with a complete Bureau. I would also ask those regional groups that have already decided on the candidates to the Bureau to formally communicate that information to the Secretariat.

As there are no other issues that any colleague would like to raise at this stage, I should like to thank all delegations for participating today and for the agreement on the two substantive items for our provisional agenda. That will allow all delegations — including, as some members have mentioned, the smaller delegations — to make the necessary preparations so that we have the best possible start when we meet on 2 April for the three-week session.

I should like to thank all delegations for their understanding and cooperation. I look forward to working with all members during that session.

The meeting rose at 11 a.m.